

DEFENSIVE PUBLICATION

Method and Apparatus for Out-of-Band Cognitive Load Management via OS-Level Digital Intercepts and Serial Hardware Feedback

Inventor: William Rodger Johnson
Organization: P31 Labs (Georgia 501(c)(3), pending)
Website: phosphorus31.org | GitHub: github.com/p31labs
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1. Abstract

This publication details a localized, sovereign computing architecture designed to manage operator cognitive load through an **out-of-band hardware feedback loop**. Unlike existing neuroadaptive systems that measure biological outputs (EEG, heart rate, galvanic skin response) to modify visual interfaces, this system **intercepts digital inputs** (OS-level API firehoses from IMAP, Slack, GitHub, and similar platforms) and **triggers physical responses** via a dedicated serial hardware peripheral.

The system comprises three novel components operating in concert: (1) a Cognitive Shield that scores incoming digital communications for urgency, emotional load, and cognitive demand; (2) a constrained 4-axis taxonomy that normalizes heterogeneous life data into a unified state representation; and (3) a hardware Totem that receives framed serial commands to provide haptic and visual feedback outside the operator’s primary visual interface.

This architecture is specifically designed as **assistive technology for neurodivergent individuals** with executive function challenges, providing a somatic anchor that externalizes cognitive state management to physical sensation rather than adding to screen-based information overload.

2. Statement of Novelty

The following table contrasts the described system with the current state of the art in adaptive user experience technology as of February 2026:

Design Axis	2025-2026 Academic Standard (XR/BCI)	P31 Sovereign Terminal
Data Source	Biometric sensors (EEG, HR, GSR)	OS-level digital intercepts (IMAP, Slack, GitHub APIs)
Mitigation	In-band UI simplification (screen modification)	Out-of-band haptic/visual cue via serial hardware

State Model	Unbounded physiological strain metrics	Constrained 4-axis taxonomy A+B+C+D
Feedback Path	Visual: same screen the user is already watching	Physical: separate hardware peripheral (Totem)
Target User	General population in VR/XR environments	Neurodivergent operators (AuDHD, executive function)

3. Algorithmic Neuro-Translation: Voltage Scoring

3.1 Cognitive Shield

The system employs a “Cognitive Shield” component that intercepts raw incoming communications from digital platforms (IMAP email, Slack, GitHub notifications, and similar API endpoints). This shield functions as a synthetic neuro-translator, quantifying the impact of external digital signals on the operator’s cognitive capacity.

3.2 Voltage Score Formula

Impact is calculated as a “Voltage Score” using the following weighted formula, operating on a **0-10 scale**:

$$V = (w_1 \times U) + (w_2 \times E) + (w_3 \times C)$$

Where:

Variable	Name	Description
V	Voltage Score	Composite cognitive load (0-10)
U	Urgency	Time-pressure keywords: urgent, asap, blocker, critical, deadline, emergency (0-10)
E	Emotional Load	Affective intensity keywords: angry, frustrated, unacceptable, disappointed, furious, terrible (0-10)
C	Cognitive Demand	Complexity keywords: review, architecture, refactor, redesign, migrate, complex (0-10)
w_1	Urgency weight	0.4
w_2	Emotional weight	0.3
w_3	Cognitive weight	0.3

3.3 Voltage Thresholds and Spoon Cost

The composite voltage score maps to discrete severity levels, each carrying a defined “spoon cost” (energy deduction from the operator’s cognitive capacity pool):

Level	Composite Range	Spoon Cost	Hex Indicator
GREEN	$V < 3.0$	0.5 spoons	0x00
YELLOW	$3.0 \leq V < 6.0$	1.0 spoons	0x01
RED	$6.0 \leq V < 8.0$	2.0 spoons	0x02
CRITICAL	$V \geq 8.0$	3.0 spoons	0x03

3.4 Spoon Theory Model

The system uses a constrained energy model based on “Spoon Theory” (Miserandino, 2003), a widely-adopted framework in the disability community for quantifying limited cognitive and physical energy:

Parameter	Value
Daily baseline	12.0 spoons
Context switch cost	-1.5 spoons
Social masking cost	-3 to -5 spoons per hour
Conflict resolution cost	-5 spoons
Breathing exercise restore	+0.5 spoons
Deep work (30 min) restore	+1.0 spoons
Hardware totem click restore	+0.5 spoons

4. Multi-Axis Taxonomy (P31 IVM Graph)

The system organizes all operator data into a 4-axis taxonomy. Each incoming data node is classified into exactly one axis. The system maintains a normalized state representation where relative attention across axes can be expressed in barycentric coordinates:

Axis	Domain	Color	Scope
A	Identity	#ff6b6b	Authentication, profiles, personal data, social identity
B	Health	#4ecdc4	Spoons, breathing, wellness, medical, sensory regulation
C	Legal	#ffe66d	Licenses, compliance, contracts, fiscal, court
D	Technical	#a29bfe	Code, infrastructure, firmware, protocols, architecture

5. Hardware Bridge and Out-of-Band Feedback

5.1 Serial Protocol Specification

Rather than altering the operator’s visual interface, the system bridges the digital cognitive state to a dedicated physical hardware peripheral designated the “Totem.” Communication is established via USB CDC (Native USB on GPIO19/20, NOT UART0) using the following protocol:

Parameter	Value (Canonical)
Magic byte	0x31 (Phosphorus-31, atomic number)
Baud rate	115200
Frame encoding	COBS (Consistent Overhead Byte Stuffing)
Frame delimiter	0x00
Integrity check	CRC8-MAXIM: polynomial 0x31 , init 0xFF
Max frame size	256 bytes
USB interface	Native USB CDC (GPIO19/20 on ESP32-S3)
Authentication (specified)	HMAC-SHA256 (first 16 bytes), 8-byte random nonce

5.2 Frame Structure

`COBS_ENCODE( MAGIC | CMD | PAYLOAD | CRC8 ) + 0x00`

Every frame is constructed by prepending the magic byte 0x31, followed by a command byte, optional payload, and a CRC8-MAXIM checksum computed over all preceding bytes. The assembled frame is then COBS-encoded to eliminate 0x00 bytes from the payload, allowing 0x00 to serve as an unambiguous frame delimiter.

5.3 Command Table

The following commands are defined in the protocol (sourced from `firmware/include/protocol.h`):

Hex	Command	Payload
0x01	CMD_HEARTBEAT	None (keepalive)
0x02	CMD_HAPTIC	1 byte: DRV2605L waveform effect ID
0x03	CMD_LED	1 byte: PWM brightness (0-255)
0x10	CMD_SPOON_REPORT	2 bytes: big-endian uint16, spoons × 10 (fixed-point, 1 decimal)
0x20	CMD_CLICK_EVENT	None (Totem → host: physical click occurred)
0x30	CMD_BREATHING_SYNC	Breathing pacer synchronization
0xA0	CMD_ACK	None (acknowledgment)
0xA1	CMD_NACK	None (negative acknowledgment)

5.4 CRC8-MAXIM Verification

The CRC8-MAXIM algorithm (polynomial 0x31, initial value 0xFF, MSB-first, no reflection, no XOR-out) is implemented identically in the firmware (C), the frontend serial bridge (TypeScript), and validated by automated tests. Canonical verification vector:

$$\text{CRC8}([0x31, 0x01, 0x00]) = 0x24$$

This value was verified by compiling and executing the C implementation on 2025-02-24.

5.5 Bidirectional Feedback Loop

The system implements a **closed feedback loop** between the host and the Totem. Data flows in both directions:

Host → Totem (downstream commands): When the Cognitive Shield processes a high-voltage communication, the host backend transmits `CMD_HAPTIC` (0x02) to the Totem with a DRV2605L waveform effect ID as payload. The Totem provides a calibrated physical cue proportional to severity, alerting the operator without requiring visual attention.

Totem → Host (upstream reports): The Totem independently tracks operator energy and periodically transmits `CMD_SPOON_REPORT` (0x10) to the host. The payload is a 2-byte big-endian unsigned integer representing the spoon count multiplied by 10 (fixed-point, one decimal). The firmware defines `SPOON_BASELINE = 120` (representing 12.0 spoons). When the operator physically interacts with the Totem (a deliberate tactile action), the firmware transmits `CMD_CLICK_EVENT` (0x20) to the host, restoring 0.5 spoons and closing the feedback loop: digital stress triggers physical warning; physical interaction restores digital capacity.

Current implementation note: The host (Python) and Totem (C) each maintain independent spoon state. Bidirectional spoon synchronization (where the host pushes updated spoon counts downstream after deductions) is a described architecture component not yet implemented in firmware. The independent tracking model provides baseline functionality; synchronization will unify the two state representations.

6. Progressive Disclosure (Adaptive Interface Complexity)

The system dynamically adjusts user interface complexity based on the operator's current spoon level, providing a graduated response that reduces cognitive demand as energy depletes:

Layer	Name	Spoon Range	Visible Interface
0	Breathe	< 3	Void palette, breathing pacer only (4-2-6 pattern)

1	Focus	3–6	Editor + AI chat only
2	Build	6–9	Full IDE (default state)
3	Command	9–12	All systems, passphrase-gated

7. Hardware Implementation

The Totem hardware peripheral is based on the **ESP32-S3 DevKitC-1** microcontroller running Arduino framework firmware. Key components:

Component	Specification
MCU	ESP32-S3 (240MHz dual-core, 16MB flash)
Framework	Arduino (NOT ESP-IDF)
USB	Native USB CDC (GPIO19/20), ARDUINO_USB_CDC_ON_BOOT=1
Haptic driver	DRV2605L via I2C (addr 0x5A), Adafruit library
Haptic motor type	LRA (Linear Resonant Actuator), feedback register 0x1A = 0xB6
Build system	PlatformIO (board: esp32-s3-devkitc-1)
Future: mesh networking	LoRa via Meshtastic (peer-to-peer, no cloud dependency)

8. Claims of Prior Art

This defensive publication establishes prior art for the following specific technical claims:

Claim 1: A method of managing operator cognitive load by intercepting digital communications at the OS/API level, scoring them for urgency, emotional load, and cognitive demand using a weighted formula, and transmitting the resulting state to a dedicated out-of-band hardware peripheral via a framed serial protocol.

Claim 2: A serial communication protocol using COBS framing with a magic byte identifier, CRC8-MAXIM integrity checking, and a defined command vocabulary for transmitting cognitive state (spoon reports), requesting haptic feedback, and synchronizing breathing exercises between a host computer and a peripheral device.

Claim 3: A progressive disclosure interface that dynamically adjusts the complexity of a development environment based on a quantified cognitive energy model (spoon theory), transitioning between discrete layers from minimal (breathing pacer only) to full system access.

Claim 4: The combination of digital-input voltage scoring (as opposed to biometric measurement) with out-of-band haptic hardware feedback (as opposed to in-band screen modification) as an integrated assistive technology system for neurodivergent individuals.

9. Implementation Status

Component	Status	Repository Path
Voltage scoring engine	Implemented	backend/buffer_agent.py
Serial protocol (TypeScript)	Implemented	frontend/src/lib/serial.ts
Serial protocol (C/firmware)	Implemented	firmware/include/protocol.h
ESP32-S3 firmware	Implemented	firmware/src/main.cpp
Progressive disclosure	Implemented	frontend/src/App.jsx
WebSocket real-time bridge	Implemented	backend/buffer_agent.py
HMAC-SHA256 authentication	Specified	CONVERGENCE_PROMPT.md
LoRa mesh networking	Planned	Future iteration

10. Open-Source Declaration

All described implementations are released under the **GNU Affero General Public License v3.0 (AGPL-3.0)** and are publicly available at github.com/p31labs/p31. This defensive publication and the accompanying source code are intended to establish prior art in the public domain, preventing any party from obtaining patent protection over the described methods and apparatus.

Organization: P31 Labs, a Georgia 501(c)(3) nonprofit (pending). Fiscal sponsor: HCB (Hack Club Bank). Website: phosphorus31.org.

Appendix A: Errata from Prior Drafts

An earlier draft of this publication (produced via multi-agent synthesis) contained the following errors, which are corrected in this version:

Item	Error (Prior Draft)	Correction (This Version)
Spoon report command	0x04 (nonexistent)	0x10 (CMD_SPOON_REPORT)
Voltage scale	0-100	0-10
Spoon payload	1-byte integer (0-12)	2-byte big-endian uint16, value ×10
CRC8 integrity	Not mentioned	CRC8-MAXIM on every frame
Auth mechanism	Described as implemented	Specified, not yet implemented
Mesh networking	"Reticulum Network Stack"	LoRa via Meshtastic
Framework	ESP-IDF assumed	Arduino framework
CMD_SPOON_REPORT direction	Host transmits to Totem	Totem transmits to Host (upstream); Host sends CMD_HAPTIC downstream.

		Bidirectional closed loop.
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